

On October 14, the White House's Climate Change Adaptation Task Force released its [recommendations](#) to President Obama for how agencies can better prepare the United States to respond to the impacts of climate change. Once again we are reminded of how important it is to have an Administration that takes climate science seriously.

According to the scientists, even if we curb emissions, global temperatures will continue to rise for decades, bringing along with them rising seas, more heat waves, more severe flooding, and more serious droughts. The Task Force's report is a solid step forward in preparing the U.S. to deal with the challenges of climate change. There are five key recommendations.

1. Mainstream adaptation as a standard part of agency planning. Agency adaptation plans should prioritize the most vulnerable people, places, and infrastructure. The plans should utilize ecosystem based approaches. Getting agencies to prepare these plans may be hard enough, but getting them to implement the plans is the crucial step.

2. Ensure that scientific information about the impacts of climate change is easily accessible. Without solid scientific information, public and private sector decision-makers cannot build adaptive capacity into their plans and activities. This effort would build on the U.S. Geologic Survey and its quadrennial National Climate Assessment. Serious efforts need to be made if this information is going to be accessible to and understandable by the public at large.

3. Address climate impacts that cut across agency jurisdictions and missions. Unfortunately, this is the case for many of the main impacts, such as those that threaten water resources, public health, oceans and coasts, and communities. In my view, getting multiple agencies (often both state and federal) to work together is one of the toughest challenges of adaptation - as a political scientist once said, teaching agencies to cooperate is like teaching elephants to dance. Some important arenas for agency determination are to improve water-use efficiency, strengthen public health systems, and develop an open-source risk assessment model. A lot of work needs to be done. For instance, current data sets for health, demography, geography, and climate are incompatible, and need to be integrated. This is probably a lot harder than it sounds.

4. Support international adaptation. The report calls for leveraging federal resources to help developing countries reduce their vulnerability to climate change. One

interesting recommendation is to enhance collaboration on adaptation among national security agencies. In addition, USAID issued a guidance document on integrating adaptation into foreign assistance programs. The report also observes that “there are significant opportunities to work with the financial services sector to spur further innovation and development of international adaptation financing and risk management strategies, including micro-insurance products.” One virtue of the report is its awareness of the potentially important role that the private sector can play in adaptation.

5. Support adaptation efforts by state, local, and tribal officials. As the report recognizes, much of the adaptation effort will be locally driven, with the federal government playing a supporting role. Developing metrics to evaluate adaptation efforts is one important step. So is providing technical support for government units across the country.

The Task Force’s Report is not an adaptation plan – it’s a plan of how to begin adaptation planning. But that’s a crucial first step.

NOTE: A [paper](#) that covers this subject in more detail is now available on SSRN.

*This posting also appears on the Center for Progressive Reform’s [blog](#).*